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## Afghanistan: The Country and Its Current Issues



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contribution from  Office of Central  
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Operations.

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directed to the Chief, South Asia Division, NESA, on

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## Afghanistan: The Country and Its Current Issues

Afghanistan is one of the most remote and poorly developed countries in the world. The population consists of a patchwork of ethnic groups, isolated by rugged terrain. Before the Soviet invasion in 1979, about 80 percent of the Afghan population consisted of tribal farmers and herders living in a subsistence level. Only 12 percent of all citizens were literate. The average has about 1000 people in each village. In Kabul, the capital city, where population approaches 2 million, the most three largest cities each have about 100,000. Except for urban areas little developed by the Soviets, the country has no significant natural resources currently being exploited. Industrial activity is meager, except in the mineral gas sector. Transportation networks are rudimentary and deteriorating. Only one hard-surface, international highway exists, and there are no railways. The insurgency, which began after the Communist coup in 1978 and increased in size and intensity after the Soviet invasion in December 1979, forces masses to provide logistical, political, military, and economic support to the Afghan regime. An Afghan government not based in the Soviet Union is a highly unlikely prospect without continued Soviet occupation.

**History** Afghanistan, though remote from most centers of the world, has been a highway along which armies, people, religions, and customs have moved. Here, Greek culture encountered Buddhism, and Muslims clashed with Persians. Here, the ancient silk routes from India and China to Europe crossed major trade routes from Central Asia to the Indian subcontinent. Afghan cities became centers of international trade and developed rich cultures long before Columbus arrived in the Americas. In the 18th to the 19th century Afghanistan was a buffer between Russia and the Indian subcontinent.

**Geography** Afghanistan, about the size of Texas, is a country of extremes. More than two-thirds of its area is mountainous. Little more than 7,000 square miles high-contrast the Hindu Kush (Western Cordillera) in the northeast, with peaks of 4,000 meters (13,000 feet) in the northeast. To the south and east lies the Hindu Kush, which extends to the Indian subcontinent. To the south and east lies the Hindu Kush, which extends to the Indian subcontinent. To the south and east lies the Hindu Kush, which extends to the Indian subcontinent.

**Population** Afghanistan's population has decreased and has declined since the first Afghan Government came in 1979. The country's population density is 15 persons per square kilometer (40 persons per square mile). Afghanistan is a country of extremes. More than two-thirds of its area is mountainous. Little more than 7,000 square miles high-contrast the Hindu Kush (Western Cordillera) in the northeast, with peaks of 4,000 meters (13,000 feet) in the northeast. To the south and east lies the Hindu Kush, which extends to the Indian subcontinent. To the south and east lies the Hindu Kush, which extends to the Indian subcontinent.

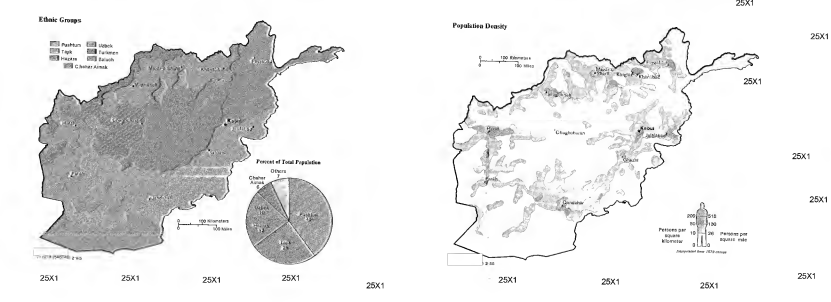
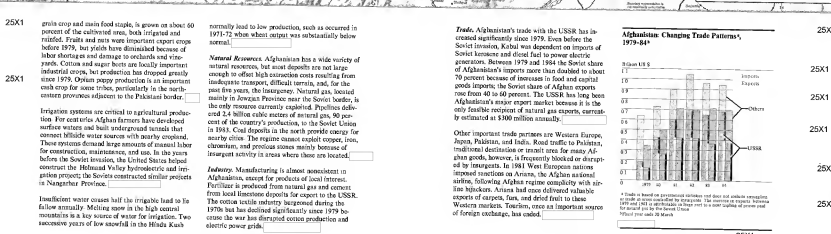
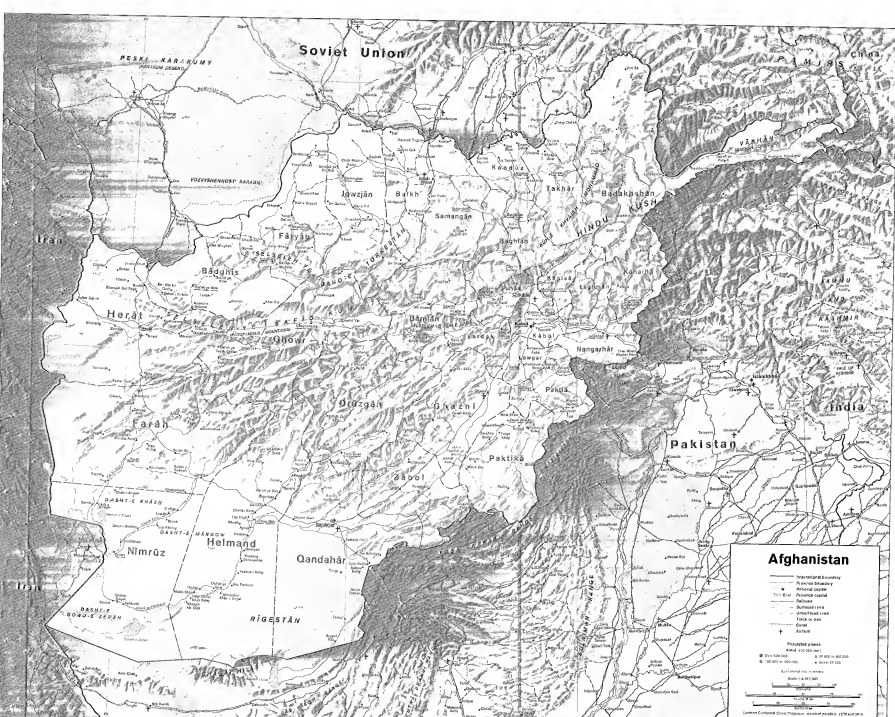
**Ethnic Groups** The rugged mountains across much of Afghanistan to the Hindu Kush have heavily influenced the development of ethnic and tribal divisions. These divisions have been reinforced by the rugged terrain, the isolation of the Hindu Kush, and the isolation of the Hindu Kush. The rugged mountains across much of Afghanistan to the Hindu Kush have heavily influenced the development of ethnic and tribal divisions. These divisions have been reinforced by the rugged terrain, the isolation of the Hindu Kush, and the isolation of the Hindu Kush.

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**Transportation** The transportation network of land-locked Afghanistan was largely destroyed by a Soviet-led insurgency that began in 1979. The insurgency has caused major damage to the country's infrastructure. The country's infrastructure is in a state of disrepair, and the country's transportation network is largely non-functional. The country's infrastructure is in a state of disrepair, and the country's transportation network is largely non-functional.

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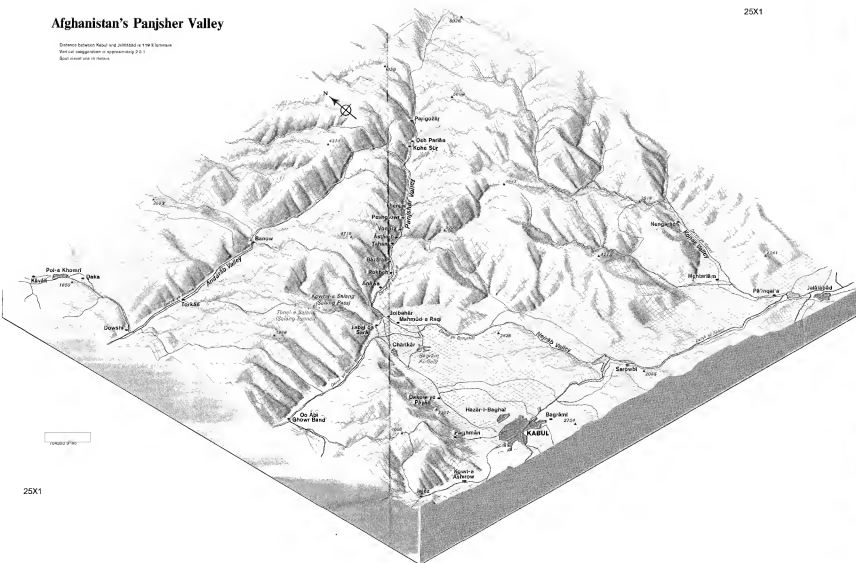
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### Afghanistan's Panjsher Valley

Source: National Map, 1:500,000, 1968 Edition.  
Map of Afghanistan is approximately 1:500,000.  
Map is not to scale.



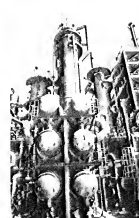
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The road shown here is a narrow, steep, and often treacherous one. It is the only road in the Panjsher Valley, and it is the only road in the entire country that is not a dirt road.



Government forces control the Panjsher Valley, and the Panjsher Valley is the only valley in the country that is not a dirt road.



The Soviet Union is building a large dam in the Panjsher Valley, and the Panjsher Valley is the only valley in the country that is not a dirt road.



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